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HOW TO

**Get Your
Church News
In Print**

By John T. Stewart

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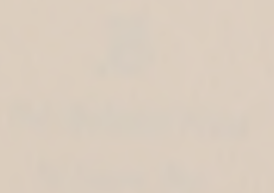
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HOW TO GET YOUR CHURCH NEWS

HOW TO GET YOUR
CHURCH NEWS
IN PRINT

By John C. Johnson
Published by the
Church of Christ





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HOW TO GET YOUR CHURCH NEWS IN PRINT

by John T. Stewart

Church Editor of the
St. Louis Post-Dispatch



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"Let your light so shine before men, that
they may see your good works and give
glory to your Father who is in heaven."

—Matthew 5:16

INTRODUCTION

The minister and his church have a stout ally at hand in the newspapers of their community. The newspapers can serve the churches as they serve business, government, politics, education, culture, sports, and amusements.

American newspapers sell 60,000,000 copies every day; their readers average two or two and a half times that number—churches and pastors would be shortsighted to overlook as tremendous a means of communication as the press.

A newspaper must print the news of its community if it is to maintain high circulation, and that general news includes church news. It is encouraging to note that the American press, since the end of World War I, has been printing many times as much church news as ever before. Religion has become NEWS. Most daily papers now have a church news department, often with a full-time editor. News magazines have regular departments of religion, and the popular magazines which aim at mass circulation run many long stories and many pictures of people and events in church life.

Evidently editors and publishers consider church news important or they would not give so much space to it. The responsibility of getting news to the press rests with the ministers and churches but it goes deeper than that. It covers not only the means of publicity but the ends as well. Church news that appears in the press must be truly representative of the manifold program of the church; it must be ample, accurate, dignified, and interesting; not distorted,

one-sided, or trivial. Above everything else, church news in the press must reflect the significant, universal, and everlasting concerns of the church; it must give the quick and careless reader of a newspaper the impression that what the church does is important and worthy of support.

The minister is an important figure in his community; he contacts the public nearly every day in the week. Dealing with the profoundest concerns of human life, he is in the truest sense a public figure. Ministers and churches make contact with their communities in many ways: in Sunday services and weekday meetings; in newspapers and on radio and television; through government and public officials; in schools, including teachers' groups, school boards, and P.T.A.; in amusements and sports, on national holidays; in contacts with groups representing business and industry, management and labor, music and the arts.

Modern means of communication—press, radio, and television—have enormously increased the potential congregation and church constituency, so it becomes important to know how to use them to best advantage.

This book deals only with the church and press, with newspaper publicity. It will show how the newspapers can be used to publicize the work of the church, extend its outreach, and widen the hearing of the gospel. Few ministers are ever satisfied with their own outreach—the newspapers call it “coverage”—or with the outreach of their church program, and this divine discontent is in their favor. Newspapers are only one of many means of public relations which church pastors find effective. Besides radio and television these workable means of communications include parish papers, Sunday calendars, occasional program books and brochures, bulletin boards, direct-by-mail appeals, posters, even highway signs.

Law books and medical books are written around cases to show how the law and medical science work out in practice. This book is filled with cases, too, to show how pastors and

churches are using newspaper publicity to promote their programs. The real-life examples used here include both successes and failures in publicity, for sometimes we learn more from a failure than from success. The purpose is to sharpen the tools in our hands. The illustrations come from the big city, small city, county-seat town, village, and rural parish—anywhere a church and a newspaper are found.

This handbook for ministers and churches was written out of my experience as a professional newspaperman and as the pastor of churches. I have now been church editor of big-city newspapers for fifteen years. But I have also written and edited church news for a small-city daily and for small-town weeklies. I have been writing church news and reading my stories in print for forty years. Yet even today I am often amazed by the scope of church news, its height and depth and breadth. In the chapters that follow we shall see what this embarrassment of riches means in getting church news in print.

Chapter One

HOW TO MAKE CHURCH NEWS

Churches do many important and interesting things. This is true of the large, the middle-sized, and the small churches. Some of these church events make news, some don't. Some of the stories will be printed, some won't. What makes the difference?

On any Saturday in the United States thousands of news stories and pictures of churches, pastors, and other church workers appear on the church pages of the newspapers. These stories had certain qualities that caught the favorable notice of the editors. Many more never saw the light of day—they lacked something vital.

What Is NOT Church News

It is necessary to consider why some church news is not acceptable for printing in order to understand the whole problem from the standpoint of the newspaper, the publisher, and the editor. The paper is a secular-slanted business, a profit-making organization. No doubt, many of the editor's decisions on news appear hard-boiled to clergymen who are devoutly interested in the welfare of the church and the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Perhaps the main reason for not printing a piece of news is the limitation of space in the newspaper and on its church page. Problems of space are the church news editor's nightmare. This point must be emphasized, for many ministers and lay people overlook it. My own territory as a church

editor includes some 1,500 churches. Some of my colleagues in larger population centers must serve several thousand churches. In addition to promoting the interests of these churches we must cover important events and developments of the many denominations and interchurch affairs, both national and international. It is like pouring a quart of milk into a pint bottle.

A conscientious religious editor is fair and impartial, he plays no favorites—his job depends on it. The denominational rivalries which we have inherited plus the normal prejudices of human beings make this part of the church editor's task extremely difficult, sometimes exasperating.

The church news editor must make up his page every Saturday as a professional journalist in the secular field; he is not writing for a denominational journal or parish paper. This means selection, of course. He will run the stories that seem to him, as a newspaperman, most important and most readable or interesting, for, if his page isn't read, he will soon be out of business. A church news page that does not have reader interest is no good for either churches or pastors. The only thing that can be done about this problem of the limitation of news space (which is getting worse, not better) is to keep it in mind.

About nine tenths of church news submitted to newspapers winds up in the wastebasket because it has no proper place in the paper—it is not news. This does not mean that the subjects of the unused stories, the events, programs, and so forth, are not important in the life of the church. It *does* mean that these stories belong on the Sunday calendar, in the parish paper, on the bulletin board, or perhaps in an announcement mailed to the membership. They do not belong in the news columns of a paper.

A church page is *not* a bulletin board. If pastors and churches would remember this, they would conserve a prodigious amount of wasted effort as well as no end of disappointments.

There is a bulletin board on every church page—the paid advertisements at the bottom of the page. Notices belong there and nowhere else in the paper. No church editor who knows his business repeats in his precious news columns what appears in a paid advertisement on the same page. The main job of the church editor is to get his page read; and national surveys show that it is read when it is attractively presented.

Sermon topics are not news. They belong in advertising. An exception must be made for small newspapers or the throwaway journals which run a column of church notices without charge. Ministers in small towns are expected to announce their sermon topics or texts in the church news column of the weekly paper.

Notices of regular meetings of church organizations, boards, and societies are not acceptable for the press. However, their programs and accomplishments may make the very best news stories.

The bane of every church editor's life is the endless stream of notices of chicken pie suppers, bazaars, bake sales, rummage sales, benefit card parties, pancake festivals, fish fries, watermelon feasts, annual sausage days, and annual apple butter days.

Every pastor and church member knows that parish events are both proper and necessary. An active congregation has many social events during the year, and some of them will raise money for worthy causes. These events have their place in church life, but they do not make church page news for the secular press, and it is a waste of time and postage to send them in. Notices concerning women's organizations should be sent to the society editor; those concerning a men's group to the city editor.

Trivia . . .

Much of the church news submitted to the press gives the impression that a large part of what churches and ministers

do is unimportant if not trivial. A youth group in a large religious body protested vigorously because their church gave them no more worthwhile task than "cookie pushing." The news editor should not be asked to waste precious space on "cookie pushing." To give an impression of triviality is unjustified in a world so full of people who take delight in belittling all religious institutions.

Three Danger Spots . . .

There are three areas of church publicity where the danger signal should be raised. First, newspapers frown upon requests for free publicity for church affairs that appear to be in competition with business firms which, unlike churches, must pay taxes. Newspapers derive most of their income from advertisers who have things to sell. I am grateful for the policy of my own newspaper; it does not give news space on the church page for affairs for which there is a charge. I have found that nearly all pastors and lay people have nothing but respect for the logical rule.

In the second place, editors react almost violently to efforts of politicians and office seekers to use their church and unpaid church news to promote their candidacy or personal fortunes. In election years I have had to reject many stories of candidates who were using church meetings as campaign forums. Newspapers give many columns and pages to politicians and political campaigns—but not on the church page. This is one place where the wall of separation between church and state ought to be "horse high, hog tight, and bull strong."

The third area of church news to be avoided is the battleground of religious prejudice and antagonism. I was news editor of a daily paper in a small city where one of the most prominent ministers used his pulpit and every other means he could grasp for a violent crusade against the Catholic Church. Every week this minister brought in half a column of news about his church and himself, and it was the policy

of the publisher to run it. But, as news editor, I had to go through the copy with a fine-tooth comb and delete all the passages that would have outraged the paper's many Catholic readers and advertisers. Many of the pastor's carefully typed statements were libelous. It was none of my business what the minister said in his sermons, or anywhere else, but it was my business to see that he did not use the newspaper as another and wider platform for the dissemination of his pet hate.

This problem of using church news for undercover attacks on various faiths and religious denominations is getting worse as American churches are trying to adjust themselves to life in a multiple society in which nobody holds a clear majority. We have learned to be on the lookout for innocent-looking handouts that are loaded with propaganda against somebody. Ministers know that even a translation of a Bible passage may be slanted for or against a controversial doctrine or a denominational point of view. We ought to value our freedom of religion and freedom of the press too highly to subvert the press to fight our theological-ecclesiastical battles for us.

What Makes Church News

Church news is many things. The possibilities for good, readable stories in the newspapers are virtually unlimited. No area of human life is more varied or more interesting. For this reason religion is big news everywhere, and a major subject for newspapers, television, radio, movies, drama, magazines, and vast libraries of books. Religion and church life reach every age and condition of man—they are the only concern that carry through from the cradle to the grave. Religion, like God's mercy and patience, is inexhaustible.

Therefore, the pastor, the officers, the laymen, or the laywomen in any church, anywhere, can make news for the press—they ARE making news. The activities and events in

the life of the church that make news must be discovered and the stories submitted to the newspaper in a form that will catch the editor's attention and appeal to his newspaper sense. There is no mystery about it. The job isn't very difficult; it can be most pleasant and profitable if a few simple rules are followed.

Ministers and all church workers should read church news in the daily and weekly papers. The information gained from such reading forestalls mistakes in handling church news and reduces disappointments.

Let us look at a number of top-rated pages from newspapers around the country and see what made the grade. They range from a California suburban city of 40,000 to New York City.

Large Meetings . . .

Every one of the church pages ran a long story about some major denomination, its convention, elections, pronouncements, and statistics. In two cases pictures were run with the story.¹

Expert and impartial surveys show that stories of denominational meetings and of interchurch or council affairs are read by more newspaper readers than any other type of church news. There are two reasons for this. First, the denominations and interchurch councils represent large numbers of people: National Council of Churches, national Roman Catholic conferences, etc. There are 10,000,000 Methodists, so their quadrennial General Conference is well covered by the press. The Southern Baptist Convention represents 9,000,000 Baptists; the International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) has some 2,000,000 members.

The other reason for the wide coverage of denominational and interchurch news is that these large organizations em-

¹How to gather and report news of large meetings is discussed in the next chapter.

ploy expert public relations men and women who know how to get their news in print. Local churches are well served by all the news coverage given to the denomination even though their stories must compete with these big-time events.

Ordination Services . . .

The church pages under review here used other top-of-the-page stories. Three papers ran stories and pictures of young men who were being ordained to the ministry. An ordination provides a good story for any newspaper anywhere. It should be handled well in advance of the event. The pastor of the church should make doubly sure that this is done. A glossy print and the complete story should be sent to the newspaper from ten days to two weeks prior to the service. The story should include an account of the young man's life, his parentage, his birthplace, all his schooling, and his appointment to his first charge if this has been made. A copy of the order of the ordination service, giving names and titles of all those taking part, should be included.²

Calls and Resignations . . .

One of the sample pages used a two-column picture of a young minister and his wife who had been commissioned foreign missionaries. This is always good copy.

Three church pages ran stories, with pictures, of pastors who had resigned to accept calls elsewhere. One editor made a feature story of a young minister who was leaving the ministry temporarily to study counseling at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas.

Calling a new minister is an important story—important to the minister, his congregation, the denomination, and the community. The resignation of a pastor or other member of the church staff is news too. In both cases a picture should be submitted with the story.

²How to prepare church news is covered in the next chapter.

When the minister or a member of the church staff or of the congregation is elected to a denominational or interdenominational office, the story with a brief description of the job should be sent to the papers. If the honor comes from the secular world, the story should be directed to the city editor, not to the church editor.

A prominent visitor who is coming to your church for the Sunday service or a weekday meeting or a pastor who has an important engagement away from home is newsworthy.

Church Dedications . . .

Three of the church pages in the survey carried long stories about the dedication of new churches, one with a three-column picture. The story of a new church or other church is always news. Often it is run by the city editor on a news page, which proves the item is sure-fire. Many big-city papers make a practice of running pictures and stories of new churches in their Sunday editions. The story and picture should be submitted two weeks in advance of the dedication service. It should have a complete description of the building including cost and the purpose it will serve; a very brief history of the congregation; and the program of dedication. City churches have learned to depend on their architects for press releases on new buildings; the church office will submit the order of service and the history of the church.

Ground-breaking ceremonies and the purchase or sale of property for church use rate high as news stories. The newspaper will require a complete and accurate description of the property including the cost.

Programs of modernization, renovation, and beautification, such as new pipe organs, church windows, or other permanent memorials, make news. Often a memorial gift has a good story behind it; this writer uses such stories regularly on the church page. The story should tell about the

person honored, his or her connection with the church, years of service, and offices held.

Anniversaries . . .

Anniversary stories call for special treatment; all papers use many of them because they have both congregational and community interest. Inasmuch as every church has a birthday every year, the church editor must draw a line somewhere. Most of us give generous space to stories of a church's twenty-fifth, fiftieth, seventy-fifth, or hundredth anniversary.

In writing an anniversary story, search for the unusual feature that will make your story outstanding. Here is the true-life story of how one church gained wide and favorable publicity by inspired reporting of its centennial. When Salem Methodist Church was preparing to celebrate the event, the minister got in touch with the newspapers and arranged for coverage. A short history of the congregation, written by a member, was printed and marked copies were sent to the papers. The story which made news was found in the history of the congregation, not in the anniversary program.

Salem Church was founded by a young missionary from Germany, who gathered a few other German immigrants around him and held services in a rented hall near the St. Louis riverfront. A striking photograph of the pioneer preacher was found and one newspaper used it. The minister translated into English an old German-language history of the church's beginnings and gave the newspapers interesting paragraphs from the old book. The story appeared in daily papers and was copied by the denomination's papers and other religious journals.

Like many other St. Louis churches of immigrant background, Salem held all services in the German language until World War I. The Salem congregation moved westward from the river as the city grew, and today occupies a beau-

tiful new church far out in the suburbs. It is not one of the city's largest churches, but few have had better publicity.

Top Stories from the Press

Church pages dramatize that infinite variety which has established church news as a regular feature of the secular press. One editor wrote a clever feature story about a church baseball team whose members washed cars to raise money for uniforms. This item was accompanied by a picture. With a story like this, no more than fifty words should accompany the picture. It's the activity that counts, and the picture tells the story.

One church page had a long story about a regional conference on religious education. This subject is more and more in the news, as the denominations spend millions on new curriculums and printed materials.

On another church page, the lead story covered the national meeting at Oberlin, in July, 1959, of the new United Church of Christ, and quoted its Statement of Faith in full. The short, well-written Statement of Faith was carried by newspapers throughout the United States and Canada; no church item of the time got wider publicity. Church news does not have to be light and frothy, or sensational, to make the secular press; even a statement of doctrine is news.

Other stories told about house-to-house religious censuses, summer institutes for ministers, organization of new churches and missions in new population centers, a denomination's study of the problems of inner-city churches, a "five-man board named to govern feud-ridden old First Church," a Roman Catholic novena, and the 450th anniversary of John Calvin.

This sampling of church pages gives some idea of the immense range of religious news—"wide as a church door." It is like a department store or mail-order catalog—it has something for everybody. It should provide suggestions of what constitutes news.

My Best Church Story . . .

The most popular, most widely read, and the longest-remembered church news item I ever ran concerned a Sunday school class of city children, a group of poor children in a backward Ozark Mountains community, and a milk cow. The story was picked up by news syndicates, newspapers, magazines, and parish papers. Letters and postcards came from readers in Florida, California, and many other states. After more than ten years the story still is brought up for comment.

One Sunday morning in old St. Peter's Evangelical and Reformed Church in north St. Louis, a class of junior boys and girls was told by the teacher about the children in an isolated Ozark community who had never tasted fresh milk. The wise teacher didn't preach a sermon, she just told her story. Of course, the city children grasped the meaning instantly. They had milk to drink every day, and they felt sorry for the mountain children even though they had never seen them. They volunteered to raise money to buy a cow. The cow was brought to the curb in front of the church in a truck, given a name, then hauled to the Ozark village.

That little story contains almost every element required of a newsworthy church story. In the first place, the characters are children, and the mainspring of the story is their natural tenderness. It is another incident in the old, old story of Christian compassion. The milk cow with her usefulness and gentleness is another appealing figure. The incident is a moving tribute to religious education—the children were eager to practice a lesson they had already learned. The adults in the background came off well, too; the alert teacher and the parents and friends of the children who helped them raise the money. It is an example of faith in action, and that is what makes news. In fact, nothing else makes good church news or any other kind of news.

News is the report of happenings—like the world series, an election, marriages and deaths, or the weather. If it is ex-

citing, significant, or merely interesting, it will be read. That goes for church news too.

The Minister in the News . . .

Every newspaperman knows that the minister is the inspiration and drive in nearly every church program. The pastor is the key figure in a church, large or small; and in a small church he is the staff. All this means the pastor appears in most church news. But not all. Yet just because the story is so familiar and has been told so many times, the observance of Christmas must have some feature about it, or what is called an unusual slant, if it is to be acceptable to a newspaper. Outdoor mangers may be very beautiful, even striking, but pictures of them are no longer news.

During the Christmas season a church or church group may present an outstanding event. If the idea has not been worn out by repetition, the story should be submitted early. A Sunday church school pageant must have some unusual feature in theme, costume, or setting to make it a news story.

Children make good stories and good pictures. I have run some wonderful action pictures of children singing Christmas carols. Many splendid pictures like these appear in newspapers and magazines. Such pictures are hard to take, not easy. The only pictures of children singing that I have been able to use were taken by newspaper photographers. The children must be shown really singing, not mugging the camera. Then, too, too many cherubic faces should not be crowded into the picture; twelve is the limit and half that many is much better.

Many newspapers, in city and country, follow the custom of carrying programs of Christmas music. The editor needs the co-operation of the churches in getting the news in time—at least two weeks in advance—and with all the titles of the numbers and names of the composers spelled correctly.

Taking gifts and good cheer to the poor, to hospitals, homes for the aged, orphanages, or prisons makes a good

story.

The observance of Lent has become widespread in recent years, even in nonliturgical churches. This makes it hard to find news items in the church program. A noted preacher, unusual service of worship, or series of services may make news. Union or community services on Good Friday make the news; all papers use these stories. The celebration of Easter holds many possibilities: sunrise services, youth services, the glorious music of the resurrection, and church decorations.

Experiences of teams who carry on person-to-person or house-to-house evangelism; stories of revival meetings; contact maintained with members in college or the armed services; stories of memorial services, family nights, and national holidays will make good news material if they have an unusual slant.

Training schools for officers, workers, and teachers, as well as laboratory schools provide excellent pictures for church pages.

These special events must *not* be overworked. They are news, of course, but they are only part of the story. As a matter of fact, these stated occasions which nearly all churches observe are not the best source of news stories. The best sources of news are the activities of the local church.

Publicity Committee . . .

Even a small church should have a publicity committee or representative. The pastor ought to meet with this little group or individual not long after the new church year gets under way, perhaps right after Labor Day, to go over the church calendar for the fall, winter, and spring. Every event that seems to hold news possibilities should be checked. When it has been decided where the best news stories lie, that organization should be consulted and somebody responsible for getting out the publicity should be appointed. The pastor will have his own church calendar and he may check,

well in advance, progress being made on giving out the news. These assignments should be made with discretion, for not every organization can be given the same coverage every year.

Where to Look for News

Following is a partial list of news sources. This list is not guesswork but is based on long experience and on a wide reading of news pages.

The annual meeting of a congregation may make news, provided some outstanding item is reported, such as remarkable growth in membership or the budget; announcement of significant plans; recognition of the minister or a member or a family for distinguished service; a clever program to enliven the occasion. If the annual meeting is deemed newsworthy, an advance notice should be sent to the editor with two tickets to the dinner—the church news editor may want to bring his wife.

Record-breaking gifts to missions or charities will provide good news articles.

A foreign missionary may be asked by his supporting church to write about the missions. Along with the story should go a picture, preferably an action picture. Medical missions or literacy classes are excellent subjects.

A Sunday church school class or youth group or other organization engaged in a program of human interest furnishes good copy. Buildings and equipment are important and necessary but they are not as interesting as action stories and pictures of human beings.

Newspapers show special favor to reports of churches working together in public services or other worthwhile projects. There is a top news story in an interracial vacation Bible school in a community where segregation in church life is the rule. These stories should not preach or stress a moral; if they are well written, that will not be necessary.

No Summer Slump . . .

What is called the "summer slump" in church activity is, in reality, the most favorable period for publicizing certain church events that would never appear in print at any other time. Summer camps for children, youth, employed persons, and families make good stories and pictures. Here again, too many people in a picture defeat its purpose.

The following idea for summer publicity has been tried with success by many churches. When a summer camp is planned, a high school or college student who has a knack for writing, perhaps a student of journalism or one who has written for a school paper, is appointed press representative. He should know how to use a camera and if he can't develop the prints, he can send in the negatives. Story and picture must reach the newspaper while the camp is in session—this makes it news. The church news editor will want a brief description of the camp site, its layout and terrain; the name of the sponsor; the daily program; names and addresses of the camp leaders spelled out. The lead of the story should be an interesting event of camp life, for example, nature study; vesper service in a picturesque setting; a hike; or a question-and-answer period on religion, choosing a vocation, dating, or courtship and marriage. Here again, no attempt should be made to dress up or formalize the questions and answers and comments of the young participants; the talk must be natural, it must ring true.

The pictures that go with a summer camp story must be natural, too. Group pictures showing only who is present have no value. At least three shots of a small group in action should be submitted; the editor will choose the one that tells the best story.

More and more church groups, youth and adult, are making cross-country tours, visiting home-mission projects, famous churches, and historic shrines. A tour may be reported for the press in either of two ways: a log of the trip may be submitted, or a few of the tourists may be inter-

viewed when they return. A picture of the party at some interesting stop—not lined up before their bus or railroad car—will liven the story.

The Church and the Aged . . .

The increasing number and proportion of elderly men and women presents a serious problem to churches. Secular agencies that serve older people are getting wide publicity. Churches have always had a profound concern for their lonely elderly members. A special program for aged persons may make a news story unless the same story of another church in the community has been used.

Stories of golden age clubs are limited in news value; what makes a better, livelier story are the achievements of retired men and women for themselves or for the benefit of their church or community. This writer knows several retired persons who are making valuable contributions to their churches by part-time service. The story should be sent to the city editor; he will decide whether it belongs on the church page or in the feature section.

The story should be factual and should play up the activities of the elderly persons, not the sponsors. A patronizing approach to the problem of the aged should be avoided as a mortal sin; so should a tearjerker about their sad plight and helplessness.

Women's News . . .

In nine churches out of ten women make news that is as interesting and readable as the news churchmen make. Besides, every church editor knows he has more women readers than men for the same reason, I suppose, that more women go to church.

United Church Women, the distaff department of the National Council of Churches; United Church Women in many states and cities; the Methodist Woman's Society of Christian Service; and the Christian Women's Fellowship,

to mention only a few groups, have wide press coverage of their programs and pronouncements.

In addition to helping raise the budget and provide a congregation and staff the Sunday church school, women's work serves in large part in the field of human welfare. Church women are courageous pioneers and undiscourageable workers in such newsmaking fields as home and foreign missions, world peace, race relations, and social justice. All these well-advertised concerns of church women are close enough to the secular society to break the news barrier.

There is, then, not much point in a newspaperman's giving advice to women on how to make news; they already know. There are, however, a few places where church women might improve their press relations.

Too large a share of publicity to annual events should not be asked. World-wide events, such as World Day of Prayer and World Community Day, are very important and should be publicized adequately every year but they are not the whole story of women's work; more local stories and pictures, with local names, should be stressed. The programs and projects of the national women's organization of the church and of United Church Women should be studied and tied into the local program.

Denominational journals and the publications of United Church Women are excellent sources of ideas for news stories.

Co-operation between the women's society and some civic organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, P.T.A., public health agency, municipal or county authorities, is news. This natural concern for human welfare should be used to advantage.

Many stories about church women are so popular in appeal that they run on a news page or in the features section instead of on the Saturday church page. The women's section of the daily paper is the natural spot for many stories and pictures of church women's work.

The church page is *not* the society page. Stories of teas, card parties, bazaars, and so forth, belong on the society page or in the women's section.

Church news is as wide in scope as human life. All churches, large and small, make good news the year around and this news is so important that it deserves the very best treatment.

Chapter Two

HOW TO PREPARE CHURCH NEWS FOR THE PRESS

Who should be responsible for the discovery and preparation of church news? The pastor cannot escape doing a large share of the work. I know from many years' experience that in a small church he will do it all and he really ought to assume the responsibility as being an important part of his total ministry. Even if he has a secretary who writes good copy, he ought to read every item before it is released.

The various organizations in a large church may want to handle their own publicity. In any case there should be a church publicity committee on which all groups are represented. No minister will want one or two groups or a few prominent individuals in his congregation to get too large a share of all the public notice the church receives.

Many churches appoint college and high school students to gather the church news and prepare it for the press. Their jobs should be well defined and their responsibility explained to the board and congregation.

The public relations person should be acquainted with the whole church organization; he or she must know where news is to be found, whom to contact, and how to handle the news gathered. More and more newspaper men and women are serving their churches in this way. A congregation who has a member who enjoys writing and knows how is very fortunate. The pastor should make sure the volunteer publicist has ability; it is well now and then to check his oversights and his overenthusiasms. Occasionally the volun-

teer should be given honorable mention in the parish paper or bulletin.

Preparing Copy

There are certain mechanical rules that must be followed when submitting copy to any publisher; they should be used in preparing news stories. Copy should be typed on one side of the paper only. It should be doublespaced with ample margins. However, if a typewriter is not available, the story may be written in longhand with all names printed. If the story can be told in a few words, it may be submitted on a post card. Editors read post cards as carefully as they do letters. Sentences and paragraphs should be short and clear and should not be carried over from one page to the next.

The writer should ask himself, "Why do I think this is a good news story?" His answer will furnish the material for the opening sentence which should contain the most newsworthy detail. For example, "Grace Lutheran Church, 4500 Grand Avenue, will dedicate a new \$250,000 church on Sunday, August 16, at 11 a.m."

The first draft of the story must answer these questions: What? Who? When? Where? Why? If it does, the writer can be sure that all of the details have been covered. Then if some of these details seem irrelevant, they can be stricken out.

When you are reporting church news, remember the general principle: Names make news. All names, titles, and addresses must be spelled out in full. If you are in doubt as to the spelling of a name, look it up; don't guess. I have received copy typed on a church's printed stationery on which the minister's name was misspelled even though it was spelled correctly on the letterhead. Failure to give full names, correct titles, and street addresses is the most common fault in stories received by church news editors. For example: it is incorrect to write: "Dr. Brown of Faith

Church"; it should be: "The Rev. Dr. John W. Brown, pastor of Faith Methodist Church." Do not write: "Judge Ambrose" when you mean Circuit Judge Alfred P. Ambrose of Dexter County.

Never use Rev. with the surname only. At the second and subsequent mention of the name in an article, write "Mr. Brown" or "Dr. Brown." It is not correct to use "Dr." following "Rev." unless the honorary degree was formally awarded. Of course, a D.D., Ph.D., Th.D., or Litt.D. degree calls for the Dr. in the man's title. Big-city papers do not use degrees after the name except in the case of a Catholic priest belonging to an order; then the initials of the order are used, as the Rev. Peter O'Fallon, S.J. The title of Archbishop or Bishop is always used. The best rule regarding the use of titles and degrees is to read the church news and then follow the newspaper style.

Letters that must be capitalized and enclosed in punctuation marks are a burden to the typesetter and frequently cause errors. The current practice is to minimize their use. Titles and degrees have no place in signatures to letters to the editor.

The copy should carry the date of the event and indicate whether it is A.M. or P.M. It should also have the date on which it was written and, if the story is to be held for a certain date, the release date and the edition should be specified. The writer should sign the story and give his telephone number; it may be important for a reporter to get in touch with him.

The story may be rewritten but this is no cause for alarm. The newspaper I work for would rewrite copy submitted by the Apostle Paul.

The editor's full name should be on the envelope. If the writer doesn't know it, he can get it from the newspaper. Many writers waste postage on special delivery when it is unnecessary.

If the editor has given a deadline, the story should be in

his hands by that date or he should be asked for an extension. All church editors are familiar with the story that arrived on their desks too late to use.

Post on the bulletin board all news stories about your church. Keep in the church office where anybody may see it a scrapbook of all news items printed about your church. It makes an interesting exhibit at an annual meeting.

Some time during the year the minister should review with the church's publicity committee the press notices which the church has received. This can be of great help in planning the next year's publicity program.

Most Stories Are Short . . .

Don't despise the short news story. After all, only a few stories can make top of the page or run a column long. Nine times out of ten the most interesting and most readable story on any church page has only three or four short paragraphs. One of the greatest stories in the world, the parable of the prodigal son, would not fill a third of a newspaper column. The editor of the church page must have from ten to twenty short stories every week to make up his page; he must have short pieces that range in length from one to four paragraphs, or from 25 to 100 words. Most church news items belong in this category. This does not mean that they are unimportant; it simply means that they are the kind of stories that can be told in a few words.

Many ministers have learned how to get three or four telling paragraphs from a Sunday sermon quoted in Monday's papers. Read the editorial page of a great newspaper like the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* or the *New York Times*, and see how much can be told in little space.

Examples of Good Copy

Here are five examples of good press copy. All of the following items were successful; every one was used by some newspaper.

From SAN FRANCISCO . . .

Our first example is a news release by the Department of Public Relations, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Major issues at the forthcoming triennial national convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, according to an advance survey of leaders of the church, will be election of officers, expansion of educational institutions, increased support of foreign missions, financial problems, relations of the Synod with other church bodies, and discussion of the report of the Synodical Survey Commission on organizational structure of the church body.

The 10-day 44th regular convention will be held in the Civic Auditorium in San Francisco from June 17 to 27.

The Lutheran news release answers a newsman's questions: What? Who? Where? When?

Notice how the professional writer of the release appeals right off to the general reader with his first two words, "Major issues." He begins his story with a clear-cut statement of what the business of the convention will be, instead of a formal announcement that the Missouri Synod was going to hold its convention. That is putting first things first.

The Lutheran story was not only eye-catching, it proved to be remarkably accurate. This writer covered the San Francisco convention for his newspaper, and the major issues were exactly what the public relations man had said they would be .

From ST. LOUIS . . .

A church convention story of an entirely different kind was prepared for the press by the Rev. Dr. W. Elbert Starn, executive secretary of the Disciples Council of Greater St. Louis.

When the 1959 assembly of the International Convention

of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) was about to open at Denver, an advance story was distributed to the secular press by the denomination's public relations officer, Ralph Neill of Indianapolis. But St. Louis newspapers naturally were interested in the large number of Disciples who were going to Denver from the St. Louis area. (All papers play up any local angle in a national story.)

Dr. Starn furnished the names and church connections of the 114 men and women delegates—a heroic task and a superb job of reporting. The inclusion of all these names made a top news story out of what, otherwise, would have been a formal report of one more annual convention.

At almost the same time as the Denver convention story, Dr. Starn handled the publicity for two more church events—the installation of a new pastor, and the cornerstone-laying of a new church. He submitted complete stories two weeks in advance, so they were used.

Dr. Starn's success in handling church news is no accident; he has cultivated cordial relations with the press for many years.

From NORTH CAROLINA . . .

The next item comes from the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church. This Methodist Church office, run by W. W. Reid, sends out as many newsworthy short releases as any denominational office in America. Many of Reid's stories have nothing to do with Methodists, they are just interesting news items from the wonderful field of religion.

Technological changes are making things tough for the modern American family in ways few people suspect, a Methodist minister from the industrial city of Schenectady, N. Y., told 150 Methodist women at a national meeting July 24 at Bennett College, Greensboro, N. C.

"For instance," said the Rev. J. Edward

Carothers, pastor of Schenectady's First Methodist Church, "consider these problems:

"The guilt feelings of people who believe they should care for their aged parents but don't really want to;

"The frustration of the young mother who has labor-saving gadgets galore but is cooped up all day with a houseful of preschool children;

"The strain on marital loyalty resulting from the husband spending more time in business contact with women associates than he does at home with his wife."

The Methodist news release, like the Lutheran, catches the reader's attention by cramming the meat of the story in the first sentence. The Methodist writer, moreover, has a trained journalistic ear for the vernacular; he uses short, homely words from everyday speech. Many news releases from denominational boards read like the gobbledygook of government bureaus or a page out of a mail-order catalog.

Many ministers are so used to reading formal prose that they find it hard to write anything in the vernacular. But of course, they can learn to write in the popular vein for the press if they try. When you sit down to write a news item for your local paper, imagine you are speaking to the editor in person or telling a friend over the telephone.

The Methodist story is admirable also for the way in which the essential facts are given without piling them up in the lead. The writer is too skillful to set up a road block ahead of his story with names, addresses, capital letters, and commas. He is writing a feature story, a story of human interest, so he uses the light touch. It would have ruined his lead if he had started in the familiar wooden style: The Rev. Dr. J. Edward Carothers, pastor of First Methodist Church, Schenectady, N. Y., addressed a national meeting of Methodist women at Bennett College, Greensboro, N. C., July 24.

From ANYWHERE . . .

Here is the way the minister of a large church handled an important event, his own resignation. The story and a picture of the man were given generous space in a metropolitan newspaper.

The Rev. Dr. Joseph Chase Emerson¹ is leaving First Christian Church, 7401 Sandhill Avenue, after a pastorate of twenty-seven years. He announced his resignation Sunday, to take effect at the end of the year.

Dr. Emerson told his congregation he will retire from the active ministry. He is 68 years old.

The news release went on to give a summary of the man's long pastorate at First Church; it included the number of members received; total church membership when he came to the church, and the present membership; baptisms; number of marriages and funerals. The story closed with the minister's personal record: birthplace, schooling, date and place of ordination, and pastoral record. A small city or weekly paper would have added a paragraph about the minister's family, but most big city papers would not.

Some of the most important news a church makes is, of course, centered about its pastor. In most cases the minister must prepare the story himself or see that it is written, and he should not hesitate to do so even though he is the principal figure in the event. In the story just told of the pastor's resignation, he dictated the story to his secretary—but not until he had been urged to do so by a church news editor who is his old friend. It was natural that he should write the story; nobody else knew all the facts, nobody else understood so well what was involved, both for himself and his congregation.

¹The names have been changed.

Yet this writer has had to argue long and earnestly with ministers who were unwilling to give out an important story for fear it might give the impression they were blowing their own horns. Or, as one of them put it, "I can't afford to write the 'commercial' for myself." It is not a "commercial," not a plug; and the newspaper readers will not mistake it for boasting. The plain truth is, the press must have the co-operation of the clergy in order to produce church news that is effective and proper. And when this co-operation is achieved, the news serves the best interests of the minister, his congregation, and the community.

"First in Giving" . . .

The last example of good copy for the press is a story from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 8, 1959. It was given over the phone by the church secretary when the minister was away on vacation. But both of them deserve credit for being alert and sensitive to news.

FIRST IN GIVING

Bethany Evangelical and Reformed Church, Red Bud and Rosalie Avenues, stood first in gifts to benevolences in 1958 among all churches of its denomination. The total that won first place was \$44,474.

The St. Louis congregation has received a letter of "commendation and congratulations" from its denomination's president, the Rev. Dr. James E. Wagner of Philadelphia. The Rev. Dr. Walter E. Scheer is in his twenty-second year as pastor of Bethany Church.

That's all there was to the story—two paragraphs, four sentences—but a nicer, neater tribute to a congregation and its pastor would be hard to find.

Special Features

Once in a while a story that is out of the ordinary rates more than a few inches on a Saturday church page. These unusual stories of religion and church life appear every day in the newspapers all over the country. They appear on a news page or in the features section, not on the church page. Many of them are used in the big Sunday edition.

A few of these feature stories appear in magazines with large circulation. Many more are published in denominational journals and other religious papers; in fact, long feature articles are run in nearly every issue of a church magazine. The feature story generally is illustrated with one or more pictures. Special feature stories cover almost anything in the wide field of religion and church life or experience of the clergy, but the story must have unusual reader appeal if it is to be accepted as a feature piece and given a lot of space. Even though the big story comes up on an average of only once in ten years for an individual church, still it does appear somewhere every day, so it must not be overlooked by pastors and churches. It is worth waiting for.

What Makes A Special Feature . . .

Following are résumés of feature stories that appeared in newspapers and magazines; they have a wide range of subject matter:

The young home missionary, fresh out of the seminary, uses a small plane, a Volkswagon, and a motor scooter to serve his North Dakota parish which covers more than 2,000 square miles.

A pastor ordains two sons to the ministry in his own church, the church where the young men grew up.

The church organist retires after playing the same organ for 65 years.

A woman organist and choir director is honored by the big church for her 30 years of service, but she was engaged

in the first place "until a man could be found for the job."

A woman is honored by her community and her church for 40 years of service to religion in many fields—in her own church, in the denomination, in the National Council of Churches, and several other church-related organizations and institutions, and in civic bodies.

A Jewish woman has been in charge of the kitchen and dining room of her temple for 50 years.

A "retired" businessman serves his church full time as business manager; he has charge of its finances and property.

A church has sent many men and women into full-time Christian service as ministers, home and foreign missionaries, and directors of religious education.

A bishop's wife helps with the parsonage chores and babysits and in other ways encourages the overworked wives of ministers while the distinguished bishop confers with the parish rector and people.

The pastor was elected president of the National Council of Churches. The story told how he made out, having to travel so many thousands of miles a year, and how his congregation made out in his frequent absences.

A minister of retirement age is elected national moderator of his denomination after he had served as a missionary to South Africa for 40 years.

A Methodist minister started his preaching career at brush arbor meetings when he was only 16 years old, and has completed 55 years in the ministry.

A famous atomic scientist first helped to build a church for the little congregation he belonged to, then studied theology and was ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church.

The famous Dr. Thomas A. Dooley of St. Louis, Catholic medical missionary to Laos, fights for his life against what doctors call "the worst form of cancer."

The oldest church in its city took a new lease on life.

The dying old church in the slum district completely

changed its type of ministry in order to survive and serve in a multiracial community.

The list of good subjects for special features might be extended for pages with stories of missionaries and of interviews with foreign visitors to American churches. Sometimes the story concerns a local church or congregation or project that deserves a feature story; sometimes it concerns the pastor or other individual.

The big feature stories and the pictures to go with them call for special treatment, and are worth it. If you think your church or minister has a big story that deserves special place and space, don't try to write the story yourself. Write a complete memorandum giving all the facts, collect at least three good pictures which actually illustrate and support the story, and submit them to the editor. Write a short covering letter introducing yourself and stating the subject of your story. If you mail the story, enclose return postage. If you live in a small city or town, take your story to the editor and ask him to look at it; then you will be able to answer his questions on the spot. If you take your story to a big city news room, a reporter will be assigned to talk to you, so be prepared to answer his questions.

If your story is rejected by the first paper, submit it to another newspaper or magazine. Don't get impatient if the editor keeps your story for weeks.

Never, NEVER, manufacture news items or imaginary details for a story to make it more interesting. Editors have a hound dog's nose for smelling out phony news, they are trained to flush out the counterfeit and you might be embarrassed.

Large Meetings . . .

We are not dealing here with national conventions where publicity is handled by the denomination's office of public relations or information. Our subject includes large group meetings at the local level: district meetings, assemblies,

conferences, meetings of conferences, synods, presbyteries, associations, and so forth.

Handling publicity for large meetings involves two simple rules in addition to the rules for handling all church news which have been discussed so far.

The first rule is the most important and the one most frequently violated: *be on time*. Do not wait until the meeting is about to open before taking care of the publicity.

Get in touch with the moderator or chairman a month ahead of time and ask him to send you a copy of the program with the names, titles, and addresses of all speakers and the titles of their subjects; insist that printed programs be in your hands at least three days before the meeting.

In the second place, *get advance copies of all speeches*. Don't be put off. When you make the request for advance copy, explain to the speaker that it is absolutely necessary in order to get adequate coverage of the meeting by the local papers. Get glossy prints of all persons who have prominent places on the program. Weekly newspapers will use mats, but a big city paper must have a glossy print, not mats or metal cuts. Do not send tinted pictures because the color would have to be screened out.

Alert the church news editor at least ten days in advance of the meeting by personal visit or mail, not over the telephone. If, during the progress of the meeting, it appears likely that some event of exceptional news value may come up, alert the newspaper.

If a newspaper is making its own coverage of your meeting, send the city editor two tickets to any luncheon or dinner.

After the dinner send a "thank you" note to the editor.

Only four denominations in St. Louis always provide the newspapers with advance material in plenty of time. When one of their churches holds a large meeting here, it sends in, without fail and from ten days to two weeks in advance, a handout with all essential information about the meeting

and the participants, including the name of the person who will handle publicity. Advance copies of program addresses and the glossy prints are mailed or delivered in person.

By seven o'clock every morning that the meeting is in session, the newspapers receive the program for the day, with any change marked, and a handout reporting the proceedings of the previous day and the times of business for the current day. They also receive advance copies of resolutions, with the release date and hour. Three times a day—morning, afternoon, and evening (for the morning papers)—the publicity officer telephones the newspapers to report any new or unexpected developments or any changes in the program and to answer any questions a reporter may have.

This painstaking method of handling church news pays off. It means that these four wide-awake church bodies receive several times as much publicity as they would have received otherwise. At the same time they are promoting the very best press relations for the future.

"A Good Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words"

Pictures of church news and of the people who make religious news are so important, so valuable that they deserve more pains and better handling than most churches give them. Every church news editor is looking for good pictures to brighten up his page and make it more readable; he gets too many pictures of buildings and mug shots, but never enough action photographs. A good, clear picture which shows a few people actually doing something may get a two-, three-, or even four-column spread in a paper of several hundred thousand circulation. Any editor will cut his stories in order to make room for a picture that tells a story.

Look at the pictures that appear in your paper or in the large-circulation news magazines. Their editors are professionals who know what art or illustrations will attract readers. Study the church page in your newspaper and see what subjects make good storytelling art.

When your church is planning an event or ceremony which you think has picture possibilities, call your newspaper or submit a memorandum describing the event, and ask the editor to send a photographer. Nearly all the pictures I run on my church page, of more than one-column width, are taken by a *Post-Dispatch* photographer.

Don't wait until the day of the event to ask the newspaper to send its photographer. Make detailed arrangements several days in advance. The photographer will be on a schedule of assignments from his office and cannot hang around for half an hour while the people he was told to "shoot" are being rounded up, so be ready for him.

How to Take Pictures . . .

Photography is not everybody's business. More than half the pictures I receive obviously were taken by an amateur and are not usable. If an amateur is taking the picture, make sure he understands what the newspaper will demand. The photograph must be sharp and clear; the figures in it must not be out of focus. If the picture is either too light or too dark, it will not reproduce.

Don't crowd too many persons into one picture.

Activity pictures are the best kind for news—make certain the action will appear. Train your camera on the activity and the few persons engaged in it, not on the background or spectators. Carefully explain to everyone who will appear in the picture what you are after, what you must have if the picture is to be a success. Get the participants' co-operation *before* you take the picture.

Always make at least three shots and send them all to the editor.

Don't write on the back of the picture unless it is absolutely necessary. If you must write, use a crayon or soft pencil, otherwise the writing may show through and spoil the picture. The best method is that used by professional photographers—cutlines are typed on a strip of paper and

pasted to the bottom of the picture. Names of persons in the picture should be typed in sequence from left to right. Women's names should indicate Miss or Mrs.

Subjects for Pictures . . .

When a new pastor is called, a glossy print of a good photograph should be sent to the newspaper for its files.

When a new church is being built, the architect should be asked to send a drawing to the newspaper; he will know what is needed.

Some of the very best subjects for religious news pictures are little children and youth.

Pictures which belong on the society page or in the women's section should not be sent to the church news editor. Weddings and their anniversaries are both good news and good art, but they do not belong with church news, even when the minister's family is the subject.

Chapter Three

CHURCH ADVERTISING

Church advertising in newspapers is expensive, so it demands competence. Advertising is a highly specialized field, and religious advertising is in a class by itself. It calls for intensive study and expert counsel. No church or minister should hesitate to call on the denominational headquarters for help in planning paid advertising.

Advertising rates are based on circulation, so if you expect to reach a wide audience, you must pay for it. Christian Science Churches are the biggest religious advertisers; they run hundreds of large display advertisements in newspapers every week. Advertising is a national policy of the church, and the year-round campaign of paid publicity is directed by professionals from the headquarters of the Mother Church in Boston. I have attended a lecture on Christian Science during the noon hour in a downtown theater which seats 1,400 persons when the house has been filled as the result of newspaper advertising.

Paid advertising pays off when it is skillfully designed and sensibly placed. A large church in a Midwestern city increased its undesignated Sunday offerings \$400 weekly by advertising on Saturday church pages. A Catholic priest told me that average attendance at weekday devotions in his old church rose from 20 to 250 after a series of paid notices in newspapers. The professional evangelist depends on paid advertising to fill his auditorium or tent.

There is a rightful place in the annual budget for newspaper advertising, as surely as there is for the printed order of Sunday worship, the weekly bulletin, and the parish paper. Many churches spend large sums on costly direct-by-mail publications which reach the same people every week. These churches could reach new families and a wider audience with a carefully planned campaign of newspaper advertising.

The church that has a professional advertising writer among its members or the money to hire one has no problem. Churches that are not so fortunate need some help.

The amount of money allotted to advertising determines the size of the ad, so the first practical step is to study a few church pages. Find one of the proper size whose makeup pleases you and examine it carefully; count the number of lines and the number of words. Notice what items of the service were in large type and which were in small.

Before you undertake to write a paid notice, ask yourself two questions: What special item or topic do I want to advertise? Whom do I want to reach? If yours is a downtown church, you will want to appeal to week-end visitors to the city, among others. This means heavy emphasis on the Sunday morning service. In a neighborhood church you will be seeking new families, so your paid notice should play up the various services that your church offers to family groups including children.

Advertising copy should carry the name and address of the church, the minister's name, the hours of services, the sermon subject if it can be stated in a few words, and not much else. Never try to insert 100 words where only 25 can be easily read. Change part of the copy from week to week. Do not run the minister's picture week after week. On a notice at least two inches in depth, a simple drawing of your church placed on the left side would catch the eye. Many of the best cuts I have seen showed just enough of the church to identify it.

At least half of the church advertisements on several Saturday pages that I examined were poorly devised. They carried too many words which made them hard to read. In one two-inch advertisement the minister's name appeared three times—a waste of precious space. These notices lacked reader appeal; there was no punch line, no single point to catch the eye.

As I write this, I have before me a Saturday church page on which eight advertisements stand out from the rest; all are effective in different ways. One church reminds the public that it is air-conditioned in a single line at the top of the notice, "Worship in cool comfort." The punch line in this advertisement is the sermon topic, "Has your Tongue Been Converted?"

Three paid notices on the page are distinguished for style. Each is illustrated with an artistic drawing in the modern style that does not try to throw in everything. The printer used type that is ideal for the purpose; it is clean, easy on the reader's eye, dignified, and attractive.

The other effective advertisements on the page depend on short punch lines for appeal. They are clean, uncrowded, and well arranged in their limited space.

Use Professional Help

Take the copy to the advertising department or adtaker of the paper and ask that it be put into expert shape. This professional service costs nothing.

Church advertising is profitable for both the short haul and the long run. It serves to promote Sunday services or a special event or speaker. It should, of course, make the most of the occasions of the Christian year: New Year's Day, Lent, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Christian Family Day, Children's Day, Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas. But it is just as useful for prestige, that is, to put your church on the community map or to establish your place.

Millions of Americans move every year. A very large percentage of them change their church affiliation—or drop it. Is your church using every means to attract and provide a church home for these migrants?

Chapter Four

HOW TO CONTACT NEWSPAPERS

The hundred men and women who belong to the Religious Newswriters Association serve as religion editors of daily papers in cities of every size in every part of the country. Gathering and writing church news they are in constant touch with the clergy and laity; there is, of course, no other way to cover the immense field of religious activity. These newsmen have to depend on friends in the churches to keep them informed; as editors of church news they are in a position to help church representatives get their news in print.

The news value of a story is not always apparent at first glance; many of the very best items are discovered in conversation between the church editor and a minister or church member. In the course of a normal year scores of tips on good stories come to my attention in this informal way. Day-by-day contacts with ministers and churches are absolutely necessary to succeed in reporting religious news.

Newspaper editors, reporters, and rewrite men are as busy as ministers. That they are being paid for their time and work should be kept in mind. The reporter should not be kept on the phone for twenty minutes to be "sold" or given a story unless he has been told by his editor to take it. He should be given the nub of the story in two minutes, just enough for him to know whether or not he is interested. If there is no hurry, either the complete story or a memorandum giving the important facts should be written and mailed to him.

There is, of course, no good reason for not taking the story to the newspaper; in fact, the minister who is a newcomer to the city will find this personal call invaluable. A reporter will be assigned for the interview; he will want to get all the information he needs to write the story. Calls at the news room should be brief and to the point. The reporter must not be asked to read a ten-page handout—he should be given a short résumé in a cordial and natural manner. To be either arrogant or apologetic is a bad approach. The story must speak for itself but the reporter should be given a chance to ask questions.

Morning and afternoon papers have different work schedules. The afternoon paper goes through the bulk of its work before noon; its working day begins between six and seven A.M. Therefore a call on an afternoon paper should be made between one and four o'clock. A morning paper's rush hours are in the afternoon and evening and a reporter will be on duty in the morning to take your story. The editor cannot be expected to do a reporter's work; he is tied to his desk until the paper is on the street. However, if your story is good, he will see it.

Approach Is Important

The clergy and newspapermen often clash. For this reason the approach to an interview with a press representative is extremely important. The list of suggestions which follows, both negative and positive, is the accumulation of long experience.

Your approach to the interview should be positive, never negative. You have a right to call on the press and to expect a courteous reception, so state your business in a straightforward manner; do not beat about the bush.

Do not tell the church news editor that your church is a regular advertiser. Newspaper departments such as news and advertising are jealous of their prerogatives.

Don't begin by saying, "Your competitor is going to use this story, so I thought you might be interested."

Another approach that will infuriate an editor is, "If you use this item, I hope you will get it right."

If your story concerns a church event to raise money, make this plain. If the funds to be raised go to an important or popular cause, the story may belong on a news page instead of the church page and the editor will direct you accordingly.

Since you represent a church, you need no better credentials. Therefore, do not try to bolster your story by introducing Big Names from the business world or society page and saying that they are interested in seeing your story in print.

Be prepared for the reporter who betrays an astonishing ignorance of church life, church organization, and church practices. Your task is to tell your story with patient care.

Don't try to convert a middle-aged newspaperman the first time you enter his office.

Don't turn up your nose at the inevitable ash tray.

This is the chance for the pastor making personal contact with a newspaper editor or reporter to be a messenger of good will. For the time being you are the spokesman for a timeless cause and you can afford to be patient, generous, and forgiving if your brother offends you.

I know newspapermen who sometimes make an ill-mannered display of their anticlericalism. On the other hand, I have seen a few ministers display an appalling ignorance of good press relations. I once had to interview a Catholic priest for whose church I was writing a flattering story with pictures. The old man received me coldly and did not ask me to sit down, so I had to take all my notes standing. He watched me throughout our interview as if he were expecting me to rob the poor box.

Billy Graham never treats a reporter as a necessary nuisance. I have worked in the press section at one of his meetings with 15,000 people present. When he found time to

leave the platform for a few minutes before his sermon, he came down to the press rows for a friendly visit. If he had ever met a reporter before, the evangelist called him by name. I have interviewed Mr. Graham in an automobile on his way from one daytime meeting to another, in his temporary headquarters in a city where he was holding a campaign, in an auditorium before a big meeting, and in his hotel room. He was always the gracious host, willing to listen and able to frame quotable answers to a reporter's questions.

Good press relations are pretty largely good human relations. When churches and ministers show themselves friendly, courteous, and helpful, the newspaper representatives respond gratefully and generously. And when the pastor or his church's publicity officer has established friendly personal relations with the church news editor or with a reporter, the task is immeasurably easier for both.

At least half of all local church news is either given over the phone or discussed in advance with the church editor. When you are giving a news item over the phone, remember that it is a business call. Have your notes at hand so that you can state your business and answer questions intelligently.

Call an editor or reporter after his work hours only when the call is a real emergency.

If other commitments make it impossible for you to take a phone call, have your secretary make a record of each call and return it as soon as possible. Ministers are noted for failure to return calls.

It is a nice gesture to send a thank-you note to an editor when he has used your news item, especially if you asked to have it run. It is not necessary to write a letter of thanks for each story about your church, but do so about once a year. If a newspaper has used a big story or one on which you worked with the editor, send a thank-you note promptly. If the paper has given publicity to your denomination, let the editor know you appreciate it.

If you enjoyed reading a news story that had nothing to do with your church or you, or if you were impressed by an editorial or other article, let the editor know. Letters to newspapers and magazines *are* read and appreciated.

How to Win Press Friends

Do not give the impression that you are interested in the papers only because they serve your purpose. Make a practice of giving them stories or suggestions for stories that do not involve you or your church, for one good turn deserves another.

When a reporter calls about a wedding, a funeral, or some other service, co-operate with him. Help him get his story. Newspapers are expected to carry a complete story about a prominent man or woman who has died, and often a reporter has to make as many as five or six calls in order to assemble his story and a notice about the funeral arrangements. He will appreciate the minister's help in the emergency.

When a reporter and a photographer appear at the church to get the account and picture of a wedding party, before or after the ceremony, don't treat them like intruders—they are there because it is their business to cover news. If your church has strict rules about taking pictures in the sanctuary, explain the rules and they will be respected. The best plan, however, is to explain the church's rules to the wedding principals and party in advance, then no embarrassing situations will arise.

The Small-Town Press

The pastor in a small town or county-seat town or any other small city has a priceless opportunity to cultivate the good will and friendship of the community paper and its staff.

The small-town paper carries church notices every week without charge. This costs the publisher a large sum of money in the course of a year, and ministers and their congregations should appreciate the contribution. At the same time the column of church news is a public service for which readers look—this is why it is carried as news. It is the minister's responsibility to see that the church notice for the column is well written, accurate, and delivered to the editor on time.

The heading of the notice will remain the same: the name of the church, the pastor's name, and the hours of worship. But the notice can be brightened up by rewriting most of it every week. You will want to announce various week-day meetings and all special events. Use the full names of persons who take part in these services and programs. The notice should be about 75 to 100 words in length; two or three short paragraphs are better than one long one.

The small-town pastor is ideally situated for serving the editor by giving him news items other than church news; this is the minister's best means of returning the favor of free publicity. In fact, it is traditional with the country press to regard the minister as an important source of community news.

In many small towns and rural communities the minister is expected to write the obituary when a member of his church dies. It is a commendable custom and should be followed. The reporter for the weekly paper will expect help in preparing news of weddings also.

Pressure or Persuasion

No greater mistake could be made than to presume that a church's demands on a newspaper deserve favored treatment. In this country we enjoy both freedom of religion and freedom of the press, and churches and ministers have a tremendous stake in both.

There is a decided difference between pressure and persuasion. Either method may bring results, but one will arouse resentment. You would undoubtedly lose respect for a newspaper if you discovered that its news and editorial policies could be dictated by self-seeking interests from outside.

On the other hand, group appeals or polite requests for publicity from organizations as well as personal appeals from individuals are right and proper. Letters to the managing editor from denominational and interdenominational agencies and officers are generally effective. There are denominational officials and bishops who have a genius for gaining the attention and favor of harassed editors. Public relations offices in recent years have had success in their persistent efforts to get more publicity. This is a nice form of pressure, familiar in every walk of life, much older, indeed, than the printing press.

When a newspaper has garbled a story or refused to use a story or picture that is newsworthy, a complaint is justifiable. Do not hesitate to make a complaint when it is reasonable. Make it as good and as forceful as you can.

How to Enjoy Good Press Relations

The cultivation of favorable press relations can be a joy to the pastor and a source of pride and strength to his congregation. Good press relations are more than clever salesmanship; they are the interplay of confidence and regard between a congregation and a newspaper, between the minister and the editor. They are something like a happy marriage in which each partner derives far more from the common store of welfare and happiness than either has put in. Such happy relations are no accident; neither are they contrived. They grow day by day, year after year.

Good press relations must be earned. Newspaper publicity must be taken seriously. Most of the mistakes ministers

and churches are making in this field are due to carelessness or indifference. Newspapers reach many more people every day than all the churches reach. You cannot afford to neglect this powerful instrument of communication. Learn how to use it; use it fully.

Your church makes news; your job is to discover that news and make it known and respected to a wider public by means of the press.

Whether you are a minister or a lay person, your newspaperman does not expect you to do his work; he knows you are not a professional journalist. He wants from you the facts for a good story or a good picture or both. There is no one in your community easier to reach than a reporter.

Good press relations will extend the church's parish and enlarge the outreach of its pastoral services. Printed stories and pictures reach people you never see; they testify to your concern for all God's children. It is one more opportunity, another open door to fulfill your mission.

The job of press relations is part of your daily work. Take it in stride. Give your newspaper stories and pictures of people taken in the practice of their religion.

APPENDIX

To see how church news is handled by the newspaper from the time the story reaches the church editor's desk until it appears in print may help the one who writes the news. The following stories illustrate points made in preceding chapters. Names and titles have been changed. Corrections made on this page required several telephone calls. Notations were made on the typed copy before it was rewritten.

Deer Park Christian Church

2727 Carroll Street St. Louis 17, Mo.

May 11, 1960

To the St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

The Department of Urban Church Life of the Board of Church Extension will hold a conference in St. Louis, May 17-18, on the problems facing inner-city churches.

Participants will be Rev. M. H. Rowland, secretary of the Department of Urban Church Life, Council of Christian Churches, and Rev. Thomas G.

Moore, representing the Board of Home Missions.

Dr. Wilbur Mason of First Church, the host pastor, will preside.

Representatives of interested churches are invited. Luncheon and dinner will be served the first day and luncheon on the second day. The cost of the luncheon is \$1.25 and for the dinner, \$1.75.

Registration will be at 9 o'clock, May 17.

Very truly yours,
James K. White
Registrar

Deer Park Christian Church

2727 Carroll Street St. Louis 17, Mo.

May 11, 1960

To the St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

The Department of Urban Church Life of the Board of Church Extension will hold a conference in St. Louis, ~~May 17-18~~, on the problems facing inner-city churches. *what denomination?*

Participants will be ^{the} Rev. M. H. Rowland, ^{pres} secretary of the Department of Urban Church Life, ^{Missionary Society} ~~Council of United~~ Christian Churches, and ^{the} Rev. Thomas G. Moore, ~~representing~~ ^{field representative of the UCL Dept.} the Board of Home Missions.

Jr., ^{The Rev.} Dr. Wilbur ^{F.} Mason of First Church, ^{Christian} the host pastor, will preside.

Representatives of interested churches are invited. Luncheon and dinner will be served the first day and luncheon on the second day. ~~The cost of the luncheon is \$1.25 and for the dinner, \$1.75.~~

Registration will be at 9 ^{a.m. Tuesday.} o'clock, ~~May 17.~~

Very truly yours,
James K. White
Registrar

Here is the story as it appeared—after it had been written in newspaper style, set in type, and proofread for mistakes.

OLD CITY CHURCHES STUDY NEW PROGRAMS

Christian churches of the St. Louis area are working on problems of their inner-city churches whose support is threatened by shifts in population—old families moving away, new families moving in.

Two national officers of the denomination, who are specialists in the field of urban church life, will conduct a conference at First Christian Church, 4440 Par-rish Road, Tuesday and Wednesday. Pastors and lay workers of all churches in this area are invited.

Leaders of the two-day conference will be the Rev. Morris H. Rowland, Jr., executive secretary of the Department of Urban Church Life of the Board of Church Extension, United Missionary Society, and the Rev. Thomas G. Moore, field representative of the Department of Urban Church Life.

The Rev. Dr. Wilbur E. Mason, pastor of First Christian Church, will preside.

The program will include addresses, group discussions, and movies of successful church programs in old city neighborhoods.

Registration will be at 9 A.M. Tuesday. Luncheon will be served both days at 12:30 P.M., and dinner on Tuesday at 6:30 P.M.

Subject: A minister's golden jubilee.

The following news item was written in longhand; the typed copy shown here indicates the preliminary corrections.

To the church editor:

The many friends of Dr. Clark will appreciate your running this story in the Post-Dispatch.

The 5th anniversary of Dr. V. O. Clark as a Methodist preacher will be celebrated at Grand Avenue Church Sunday, Oct. 12. A dinner will be given after the morning service.

Dr. Clark was ordained in Grand Avenue Methodist Church 50 years ago. He was pastor from 1922 to 1959. He retired in 1959.

Dr. James Evans of Belmont Church, Kansas City, Mo., a brother-in-law of the honoree, will bring the message.

Present and former members of the church are invited.

~~To the church editor: e~~

~~The many friends of Dr. Clark will appreciate your running this story in the Post-Dispatch.~~

The ^{the Rev. Dr.} 5th anniversary of ^{Vernon O.} Dr. V. O. Clark as a Methodist preacher will be celebrated at Grand Avenue ^{Methodist} Church, Sunday, Oct. 12. A dinner will be given ^{2719 South Grand Blvd.} after the morning service.

Dr. Clark was ordained in ~~Grand Belmont Avenue Methodist Church~~ ^{50 years ago.} ^{Oct. 10, 1910} He was pastor from 1922 to 1959. He retired in 1959.

C. Dr. James Evans of Belmont Church, Kansas City, Mo., a brother-in-law of the honoree, will bring the message.

Present and former members of the church ^{who were received by Dr. C.} are invited.
 (Present pastor?)

The CLARK story as it appeared:

METHODIST PASTOR MARKS ANNIVERSARY

The Rev. Dr. Vernon O. Clark, who was pastor of Grand Avenue Methodist Church, 2719 South Grand boulevard, for 37 years, celebrated his fiftieth anniversary in the ministry this week.

A service in his honor will be held at Grand Avenue Church tomorrow at 10:45 A.M. The guest preacher will be the Rev. Dr. James C. Evans, pastor of Belmont Methodist Church, Kansas City, a brother-in-law of Dr. Clark. The pastor of Grand Avenue Church, the Rev. Alfred M. Jones, will conduct the service.



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Dr. Clark was ordained to the Methodist ministry at Belmont Methodist Church, Oct. 10, 1910. He retired from the active ministry in 1959. He was pastor of Grand Avenue Church from 1922 until his retirement last year.

Members and former members of Grand Avenue Church who were received into church membership by Dr. Clark are especially invited to the golden jubilee service tomorrow, and to the dinner which will follow.

[illegible]

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